



CHRYSTEL LEBAS & SOFIJASILVIA

Conversations on Nature

Exhibition opening: June 16 at 8 pm Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka, Croatia, June 16 – July 30 Curator: Liz Wells

PHOTO FORUM, June 17, The City Hall, City of Rijeka

Forum Speakers: Liz Wells (Writer, Curator and Convenor, Land/Water and the Visual Arts at Plymouth University); Alexandra Lazar (Freelance Writer and Curator, Researcher at Courtauld Institute of Art, London); Chrystel Lebas & SofijaSilvia; Djuro Huber (Professor Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb); Sandro Dujmović (Expert-protection activities of Brijuni National Park).

Through photographic investigation of two Croatian national parks **Chrystel Lebas** and **SofijaSilvia** invite us to reflect on the interaction of humans, animals and the botanical. What do we learn about the histories of these specific places, about human ideals, and about forestry and horticultural vision from examining the shaping of these landscapes and the remains of buildings from former eras? Investigation of complex environments such as managed parks, wherein tensions in the integration and interaction of natural and cultural phenomena are variously manifest, takes time. Both artists return frequently to specific sites, at different times of year, waiting, observing, listening and documenting that which occurs. In their '*Conversations on Nature*' SofijaSilvia and Chrystel Lebas reference traditional painting styles, constructing poetic tableaux. As a contemporary register of natural phenomena the exhibition invite us to reflect on attitudes to nature and on approaches to the conservation and management of rural areas often paradoxically represented as pastoral preserves for walking and climbing whilst simultaneously organised as spaces for hunting and fishing, killing pursuits that seemingly contradict the idealisation of animals and of traditional agricultural scenarios such as vineyards and olive groves that motivates the protection of wilderness areas as national parks.

Spending time in remoter areas of the Brijuni islands, SofijaSilvia observed the animals roaming freely around the park. This led her to reflect on the idea of the island as a landscaped garden and on our position as observer of an idealised 'nature' re-organised in response to human interests and desires. Focusing on the animals and the woodland habitat her photography and moving imagery testify to the complex story of the islands, offering insights into a history that still is not common knowledge and glimpses of scenes not normally experienced on a day visit.



Sofija Silvia, *Silent Islands, Brijuni -Imaginary Landscape – no. 02 – Fog, C – Type, 2009*

Lebas' link with Croatia, specifically Risnjak National Park, developed from this search for wider understanding of this complex encounter between man and nature. Like animals and hunters, she ventures out at dawn and, more often, at dusk, filming in twilight when illumination gives way to darkness, the familiar becomes strange, the seen becomes imperceptible, and, like animals, we are forced to rely on instinct and intuition, on sound, smell, texture rather than sight. Unlike woodlands explored by her elsewhere here the presence of bears, stags, wolves and lynx, that renders the Risnjak highlands both potentially dangerous and particularly attractive for hunters and for tourists, enhances her fascination.



Chrystel Lebas, *Presence-Untitled n.30 -Risnjak -Kupa-2010*

SofijaSilvia -(Silvia Potočki Smiljanić)

Born 1979 in Pula, Croatia. Received her BA honours in 2002, from FAMU -The Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Czech Republic. In 2007 graduated from the MA Fine Art course at the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design London. She has shown her work internationally in various galleries including in Graz, Austria at the Camera Austria gallery at the Kunsthhaus, in Slovenia at the Slovenian House of Photography APT Gallery, Moderna galerija and Mestna galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb, Croatia and most recently at the Brot Kunsthalle in Vienna, Austria. In 2010 she organized and curated Inside the Island, an international group show and symposium, on the island of Brijuni, National Park Brijuni, in Croatia. Her work has been published internationally in the Camera Austria International magazine, Czech Fotograf, Slovenian Fotografija and Croatian Čovjek i prostor, Kultura and Oris, in 2010 in Sandra Križić Roban's book At Second Gance, Positions of Contemporary Croatian Photography and in 2011 HRT (Croatian National Television) filmed two documentaries about her work for the series Photography in Croatia and Portrait.

Chrystel Lebas

Born in France, Chrystel Lebas lives and works in London. She graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1997 and has exhibited in the UK and internationally.

Selected exhibitions: 'Chrystel Lebas, Etudes Bel-Val', Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris (2010); 'Between Dog and Wolf' at Witzenhausen Gallery New York & Amsterdam (2010), Focal Point Gallery, Southend on Sea, UK (2008), and Nichido Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2003); 'Blue Hour' at The Photographers' Gallery, London (2006), 'Twilight: Photography in The Magic Hour', Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2006) and film screening at The Musée de la chasse et de la nature, Paris (2008). The monograph L'espace temps-Time in Space (2003) received a British Book Design and Production Award 2004 and was included in the Rencontres d'Arles Book Award Exhibition in the same year. Also exhibited in Arles her second monograph Between Dog and Wolf (2006). Works by Chrystel Lebas are held in several private and public collections amongst them the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), The National Media Museum (Bradford), Vital Art (London), The Citigroup Private Bank (UK), Le Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature (Paris) and The Wilson Center of Photography (London). Currently Adjunct Assistant Professor at Richmond the American International University in London and Associate Lecturer at University of the Arts London.

Liz Wells writes and lectures on photographic practices. She is author of Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity, I B Tauris, 2011. She edited The Photography Reader, 2003, and Photography: A Critical Introduction, 2009, 4th ed. and is also co-editor of photographies, Routledge journals. Exhibitions as curator include Uneasy Spaces (New York, Sept -Nov. 2006), Facing East, Contemporary Landscape Photography from Baltic Areas (UK tour 2004 -2007) and Landscapes of Exploration (forthcoming 2012). Publications on landscape include Liz Wells, Kate Newton and Catherine Fehily, eds., Shifting Horizons, Women's Landscape Photography Now, 2000. Recent essays on photographers exploring people and place include 'Silent Landscape' EXIT 38 (Spring 2010); 'Figures in a Landscape', Trine Søndergaard and Nicolai Howalt, How to Hunt (2010); 'The Extraordinary Everyday', Marte Aas, (2010); 'Poetics and Silence', Jorma Puranen, Icy Prospects. (2009).

She is Professor in Photographic Culture, Faculty of Arts, University of Plymouth, UK, and convenes the research group for Land/Water and the Visual Arts. www.landwater-research.co.uk

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